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POLITICAL DILEMMA IN ITALY[1]

The following article ~~is intended to~~ apparently defines certain inescapable political choices which arose in Italy and will continue to arise as we advance further on the continent. In particular, it discusses the problem of the adjustments we must make in our political warfare if the widespread use of underground movements enters into our military calculations. The article assumes throughout that the primary aim of political appeals addressed to the Italian people is to save lives by securing through non-military means advantages which would otherwise have to be gained through direct military action. That is, it limits itself to a consideration of our Italian policy as an instrument of military action and does not go into its perhaps equally significant role as an instrument of the post-war settlement.

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[1]Prepared in the Research and Analysis Branch.

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THE invasion of Italy has presented our political warfare with its first major continental test. In conducting this invasion, we have offered a set of political choices to the Italian people presumably designed to maximize their own resistance to the Germans and to minimize the expenditure of Allied lives. It would seem desirable at this point to attempt an evaluation of the success of United Nations in achieving these objectives.

United Nations Policy

The essence of Allied political warfare in Italy after the surrender was stated authoritatively by Winston Churchill before the House of Commons.

> It is necessary in the general interest as well as in that of Italy that all the surviving forces in Italy's national life should be rallied together around their Government and that the King and Marshal Badoglio should be supported by whatever liberal and left-wing elements are capable of making head against the Nazi Quisling gang.

The advantages of such a policy are clear. It has ~~gained on~~ brought to our side the Italian Government with the best claim to ~~legitimacy~~ legality and thus to the obedience of the armed services, diplomatic officials and government functionaries in general. The Navy, the great majority of Italian diplomats abroad and many units of the Army have rallied to the Allied cause. It is true, however, that the authority of Marshal Badoglio's Government does not extend much beyond territory conquered by Allied Armies and therefore under Allied control anyway.

The disadvantages of such a policy are also clear. The United Nations have now designated as heads of the anti-Fascist opposition in Italy men who for many years have been important bulwarks of the Mussolini regime. This alliance inevitably involves certain political contradictions. Some are ludicrous, such as Victor Emmanuel's evident intention, even at Bari, to continue describing himself as Emperor of Ethiopia and King of Albania until Allied pressure finally forced him to agree not to "insist" on these titles. Other consequences are more serious, such as the effect of this policy on Italian resistance movements and thus on the energy with which these movements can be expected to aid the Allied advance.

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Revolutionary Potential in Italy

Are there in fact resistance movements in Italy which, if activated by our assistance and by faith in our cause, might materially reduce the expenditure of Allied lives?

The evidential problem in estimating the strength and size of the underground is exceedingly difficult, for reasons inherent in the nature of underground operations Italy is, of course, a country with a strong tradition, especially in the north, of syndicalist violence, of direct action, and of secret political movements. Twenty years of Fascism trained opponents of the regime in the weapons and methods of undercover organization, and at various times powerful underground groups are known to have made considerable trouble for Mussolini's secret police.

Since Italy entered the war, manifestos have occasionally appeared purporting to come from underground groups, and rumors of popular resistance movements have filtered out through neighboring neutral countries. In some quarters it is ~~believed~~ suspected that the alleged organizations are creations of the British Foreign Office and have no effective existence in Italy. Others, pointing to the Italian tradition of clandestine political action, argue that the non-existence of an underground would be considerably more surprising than its existence, and thus construe the presumption in its favor. The best informed OSS intelligence sources state unequivocally that well organized resistance movements exist in Italy, though obvious considerations of security, of course, prevent citation of detail.

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The Italian uprising in Naples is adduced as an example of the potentialities of anti-Fascist clandestine action. For several days before the Fifth Army entered the city, Italian groups carried on organized resistance which seriously hampered the German evacuation and was prolonged and bitter enough to break into the German communiques (where the disturbances were declared to be "Communist riots"). The careful correspondent of the New York Times, with considerable experience in Spain and elsewhere in the conditions of modern war, commented after a survey of the Neapolitan street battles, "If every city fights as this one has done the Germans will not hold Italy nearly so long as they would otherwise do." Observers of the Italian situation declare the northern cities, with their more vigorous traditions of labor organization and of underground activity, to be capable of considerably more efficient and determined resistance than Naples.

The recent statement of Badoglio promising an eventual reorganization of the Italian Government in order to broaden its base and include liberal and labor representation may be regarded as a significant official confession that these groups are stronger than our policy originally allowed. If there were no effective opposition elements behind the German lines, it is hard to see why the cabinet should be reconstituted in order to include representatives of such an opposition. (Badoglio has told Allied diplomats, however, that he does not think Victor Emmanuel would "permit" him to invite Sforza to join the government, which suggests that the King has no particular intention of participating in the "political truce" of which Sforza has made himself the staunch advocate and which is presumably an essential part of the Churchill policy.)

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Effect of Allied Policy on the Underground

If the resistance movements do, then, exist in sufficient force to obstruct the Germans in Naples and compel Badoglio to pledge a reorganization of his government, what have been the effects on them of the political choices presented Italy by the United Nations? The policy enunciated by Churchill was, of course, calculated to appeal especially to men loyal to "legitimate" government, to monarchy and to the persons of Badoglio and the King. But, while not addressed directly to those who for years have opposed the reigning government of Italy, the House of Savoy, Badoglio and the King, it might reasonably be expected to win them over in face of the overwhelming common danger.

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There are grounds for believing, however, that this expectation has been disappointed. The political appeals sent by the Allies to the Italian people have apparently run up against convictions ground in by too many years of Fascism; the government of the King and Badoglio evidently seems to many Italians too negligible a change from the government of Mussolini, the King and Badoglio to provoke much enthusiasm or warrant much sacrifice. Evidence suggests this to be especially the case among the most active political groups who would have to bear the brunt of subversive activity, sabotage and open resistance in support of the allied military operations. If we wish to use these groups, ~~we must~~ must we not accept this fact.[2]

A recent report from an OSS representative abroad declares, for example, that the people of north Italy are "disconsolate and ashamed." This source strongly recommends that our propaganda avoid giving any impression that we have decided in favor of the monarchy. "Badoglio's radio pronouncements are taken in Europe as having the stamp of Allied approval. Therefore, Badoglio's statement that the King and the Royal House are 'the expression of the will of the Italian people' was unfortunate, as the Italian people know the Royal House has not given any evidence of will for more than 20 years, except to countersign Mussolini's orders. Likewise unfortunate was Badoglio's statement that the peasants and workers 'under the direction of the King and government, will together establish the future destinies of Italy.' This has serious implications, as it suggests to the Italians that the Royal House, which shares war guilt with the Fascists, has been approved by the Allies for the indefinite future."

The OSS representative goes on to urge broadcasts telling the people "that we recognize that the war we have fought with Mussolini was a Fascist war, and that now the real people's war of liberation has started for them . . . . If we are successful, the Italians in North Italy will make life miserable for the Germans in North Italy and produce results of real military significance."

The broadcast of October 2, in which Victor Emmanuel was allowed to say to the Italian people, "As yesterday, as always, your King is with you, indissolubly linked with the destiny of the immortal fatherland," would not seem calculated, in view of available evidence, to produce such results.

The feeling against the King is by no means confined to radical underground organizations, though it is mainly in those circles ~~where~~ that it has military importance. The philosopher Benedetto Croce, for example, was described in a recent interview as having "nothing but harsh words for Victor Emmanuel and his family, who had always yielded to the Fascists and demeaned themselves in a manner that he and others who felt like him considered ignoble." Even Count Sforza, for all his desire to work with the United Nations, has so far refused to endorse the King or join the Badoglio Government.

The spreading paralysis among the potential anti-Fascist opposition has been promoted, not only by official Allied recognition of their ancient enemies as heads of the Italian state, but also by the vigorous anti-monarchist, anti-plutocratic, anti-clerical propaganda of the Republican Fascist Government. While few people are deceived by Mussolini's new pose, many are troubled and confused by the success with which his propaganda is portraying the United Nations as the savior of Italian reactionary interests. The effectiveness of this line is suggested by Croce's reported remark to Herbert Matthews that he "would like to see an Italian republic, but he believes that it will be difficult since the Fascists have usurped the term." Thus ~~it would~~ it might seem that Allied policy has induced in those people suited for subversive work by temper, tradition, and circumstances, a feeling of marked hesitation.

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The Political Dilemma

In making political appeals to countries under enemy control, we enter a dilemma which our political warfare must understand if it is to be effective. It is likely that the Badoglio Government -- the military coup -- sets the pattern of collapse which will overtake all fascist and most satellite states. But the Italian experience strongly suggests that, if we wish to utilize underground movements in such countries, we cannot commit ourselves too broadly to whatever Badoglio regime may happen to ~~have~~ fall in our hands.

In part this is simply a decision of fact. If ~~no~~ it should be thought that no elements of effective opposition exist behind the German lines in Italy, then we have no choice but to fight an exclusively military war, however costly. If, however, they do exist -- and this seems to be the case -- our policy has thus far failed to exploit them. If we now desire to create a maximum of chaos behind the German lines, especially in the important industrial and transportation centers in the north, we must recognize that we can secure the assistance of underground groups only if they are convinced of ~~an identity~~ a convergence between their aims and our own.

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The use of an underground movement is, on the whole, incompatible with insistence on the political and social status quo. An underground operation in a Fascist state is in its very essence a revolutionary operation. Its aim is the subversion of the existing machinery of force. Its techniques have been the specialty of revolutionists for over a century. The temper, training and position for underground activity on behalf of the United Nations are to be found, by and large, in association with definite political ideas, which are not likely to be "conservative."

The men of the Italian underground can still be very useful to us, even as a direct tactical aid to military operations. Their own organizations, developed first for action against Mussolini, then for action against the Axis and the war, may still be used in some respects as a substitute for the fifth column we failed to build up. But it is useless to expect them to ~~act~~ take the enormous risk of acting in our interest ~~and take enormous risks in order to enable us~~ when they interpret our policy as designed to reestablish pretty much the status quo ante. We cannot call on people to revolt and then expect to maintain the existing power arrangements. We must presumably make our choice, and our decision in Italy will have profound effect on the kind of aid our armies may look for from underground movements in other parts of Europe.

If it is our decision that the gains from standing by the Badoglio Government and the existing power arrangements outweigh the gains from active subversive operations behind the enemy lines, we must expect one further consequence. The popular resistance movements, if persuaded that the Anglo-American armies intend only to restore a slightly refurbished model of the old regime, will inevitably turn to quarters where they can expect help in their mission of social reconstruction -- that is, to Soviet Russia. Already intelligence reports from Italy state that peasants and workers are looking increasingly to Russia as the "land of the common man," a description previously used in Italy for the United States. According to OSS representatives, this swing to communism is for the sake of resistance, not of ideology, and may be best interpreted as a revolt against the industrial magnates who supported Fascism. Britain and America cannot then support these industrial magnates and hope to retain the confidence of the underground. The stake

is not simply Italy. It is likely to be the political allegiances of resistance movements everywhere in Europe.